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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
02/03/05

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WEST CAMPUS TO CHANGE HANDS

LITTLE ROCK – It's official. West Campus Technical High School in Fayetteville will become part of Northwest Arkansas Community College (NWACC) July 1.

The move from the Fayetteville Public School District to the community college was approved by the State Board of Workforce Education and Career Opportunities (SBWECO) today at its bimonthly meeting.

As part of the community college program, West Campus will get a name change – to Northwest Arkansas Community College Regional Technical Center – and a more focused vision on the integration of academic and technical courses that will expand opportunities for students in Washington, Benton, Madison and Carroll counties.

The transfer also will mean Fayetteville's alternative school program, which was housed at West Campus, will be moved to the East Campus and will focus more on addressing the social needs that put students at risk.

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“We truly believe technical education has to have its own focus,” Dr. Bobby New, superintendent of the Fayetteville schools, said. “It never made sense to me that we chose technical programs over the years to be the main delivery of alternative education.”

He added that all students – not just those at risk of not graduating – need the hands-on application and skills that technical education provides.

According to the agreement between the school district and NWACC, the college will assume the administrative and fiscal oversight of the technical center and will lease the facilities from the school district for \$3.50 per square foot (there’s 64,000 square feet of space) in equal monthly installments of \$18,666.67.

“Although we are changing the way we deliver our program, we hope to build a new model,” Dr. Lee Haight, West Campus principal, told the board. This model will bring more integration of academics with career and technical education.

And by being part of the community college, the center will be able to offer more concurrent credit courses (classes for which students get both high school and college credit) in academic and technical areas, Haight said.

This move will create a “more seamless environment” in which students will no longer view their high school diploma as a terminal achievement; instead, they will see it

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as a continuation in their education as they go on to postsecondary programs, New said.

Dr. Steve Franks, director of the Department of Workforce Education (DWE), agreed that the transfer of West Campus will open doors to “postsecondary education to high school students who may not have thought they could go to college.”

Earning college credit while they are in high school “boosts their confidence and self-esteem,” he added. It also can save the students and their parents time and money by giving them a jump on college courses and tuition.

The board’s approval was an emotional moment for John Davidson, DWE deputy director for career and technical education, whom New credited with creating the vision for a regional technical center.

Davidson’s ties to West Campus go back to its beginning in 1964. Both of his brothers attended the school, and he served as its principal from 1990-1999.

“We did lots of work,” Davidson recalled. It was under his direction that the school began offering some college credit. But he said it was New and Dr. Becky Paneitz, NWACC president, who fulfilled the vision.

“I’m extremely proud that it happened,” Davidson said following the SBWECO board meeting. He admitted he felt a bit like Moses looking upon the Promised Land.

He sees the students as the big winners in this transfer. And the kids have

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always been the center of the West Campus vision, he said.

By linking the technical center to a college, Davidson said, area educators are telling the students, “‘We’re going to give you a bigger dream.’ That’s what it’s all about – enlarging the dream.”

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